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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the senior high school curriculum in Nigeria focuses on the role of English, considered an important language for educated individuals. An overview of the structure of the secondary curriculum is offered, and the sociolinguistic and pedagogical significance of English in the society is examined briefly. The senior high school English curriculum is then described, with attention given to its objectives and format, syllabus problems and limitations, and the phenomenon of widespread English language deficiencies. It is suggested that the best way to remedy the latter problem is to use the native language as the medium of instruction during primary education, to firmly establish literacy and numeracy skills, then concentrate on developing communication skills in English in junior high school and on grammar and refinement of English skills in senior high school. English would continue to be the medium of instruction in secondary education. Additional recommendations include making the upper-level English curriculum more learner-centered and communication-oriented, emphasizing language across the curriculum, and redesigning the school-leaving examination to measure communicative competence better. This might include differentiated examinations based on student academic and career objectives, and assessment respecting local variations of English. (MSE)

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The Place of English in the SSS Curriculum in Nigeria
The State of the Art

By: Dr. A. Mohammed

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The Place of English in the SSS Curriculum in Nigeria The State of the Art

By: Dr A. Mohammed

Abstract

The primary goal of the SSS English language curriculum is to develop a high level of proficiency in English to meet the language requirements of educated Nigerians. This is constrained, however, by its structural weaknesses, the negative backwash of the apalling SSCE results over the years and unfavourable learning situation generally. This paper suggests that the best way out is to adopt a pragmatic pluralistic approach consistent with the country's language situation and the universalistic objectives of the National Policy on Education (NPE)

1.0 Introduction

The SSS Curriculum as the name indicates covers various course offerings approved for the second (Senior) tier of secondary education under the 6-3-3-4 system. It is supposed to reflect the broad aims of Secondary education as specified by NPE (1981:16) namely, to prepare Nigerian youth for useful living within the society and for, as many as possible, higher education as well.

But while the Junior Secondary School (JSS) is supposed to emphasize pre-vocational and academic courses, the SSS is to expose youths to both technical and academic courses depending on their talents. In this way "the Nigerian of tomorrow" will, hopefully, be prepared" for living in the world's technological age, to be part of the late twentieth century culture, and ready to be launched into the twenty-first century and its technology" (Fafunwa, 1992:31) Other related aims of secondary education include the wish

- to develop and project Nigerian Culture, art and language as well as the world's cultural heritage;
- to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, and appreciate

those values specified under our broad national aims, and live as good citizens;

- to foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
- to inspire its students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life (NPE) 1981:16)

In pursuance of these objectives a change of emphasis was decreed from the traditional 3Rs (reading, writing and Arithmetic) to 3Hs (the head, the heart, and the hands) - what Bajah (1987:54) describes as the education of the total person rather than the mere teaching of subject disciplines. Accordingly, examination was de-emphasized in the new system and the following stressed:

- acquisition of skills;
- provision of options in the curriculum;
- emphasis on the worth of life;
- exposure to technical versatility
- promotion of nationalism through an understanding of relationships of individuals to one another and the state.
- promotion of physical fitness and living and learning the lessons of hygiene, morality and fair play as a member of a team (Sofolahan 1987:11)

The goal of all these curricular changes and innovations is to enable the student to specialize in either the arts, the sciences, vocational education, primary teacher education or technical/technological education if he so wishes. Unlike in the old GCE O'Level/WASC Syllabus, a core of six subjects is prescribed for all students, regardless of what they wish to become or do after finishing school. The most central among these, is English language because of its pivotal role as the most versatile means of communication and as the principal medium for acquiring knowledge in other subjects. The other core subjects in the SSS are Mathematic's, one

major Nigerian language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba), one Science subject, one arts subject, one Vocational subject or Agricultural Science.

The electives, on the other hand, consist of about 32 other subjects, three of which only are required to be taken with the (six) core subjects in the final examination (SSCE). Given the broad aims and structure of the SSS curriculum briefly the described above, one can easily see that English is assured a prominent and, possibly, a permanent place not only in the SSS but throughout the education system; otherwise the new NPE objectives especially with respect to science/technology education would hardly be achieved.

It is evident from the policy objectives, however, that the primary focus is on the education of the whole Nigerian child. Therefore special attention should be paid to that fact when drawing up the syllabuses and teaching strategies for the various subject disciplines to be taught. It is important to stress this at this point because existing curricula seem to be more concerned with meeting, or aping, certain external criteria or norms (the so-called "international" considerations) than concentrating on the students' peculiar needs. This appears to be particularly the case in the area of attainment evaluation in the various disciplines and notoriously more so with respect to English, with very disastrous results.

We shall argue below that unless this built-in bias is eliminated from the system the original intentions of the NPE will not be attained and Nigerian students' will continue to be the worse off for it socially and academically.

1.1 The Importance of English

As indicated above English occupies a unique place in Nigeria education because of its significant role and status in the national life. That is to say English is sociolinguistically important in Nigeria, in spite of its

colonial origin, having become over the years both the language of official business as well as a vital link language between the various ethnic groups in the country. It is also pedagogically significant as the language of instruction in the entire school system from upper primary to the highest tertiary levels. It thus enjoys a lot of prestige as a language over and above other Nigerian languages, big or small. Accordingly a good pass in English has become a mandatory requirement for transition from primary to JSS, JSS to SSS and for admission to all levels of higher education in the country.

English is, in effect, the second language of Nigeria, essential for success in the educational process and in other areas of the national life. It is not surprising, therefore, that so much attention and resources had been and continue to be devoted to its teaching in Nigerian schools, and this is likely to continue for many years to come. Surprisingly, and quite disappointedly, however, the students proficiency in English as measured by WAEC examinations seems to be declining rapidly, particularly since the introduction of the new Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) in 1988, a slightly higher examination which replaces the defunct GCE O'level examination but not exactly up to 'A' 'level standard. For instance, the failure rate in English in the last five years has been in the region of 70% - 75%[1] annually, which is very disturbing and unacceptable. As indicated by the statistics in Appendix I, the problem is not confined to English alone but extends to all the other subject disciplines, though in varying degrees, but the close correlation between failure in English and failure in the other subjects, particularly Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Geography is quite evident and very alarming. This seems to lend strong support to the suggestion that many failures in the school subjects are really failures in English (cf. Banjo 1989:4); in other words, they are occasioned by poor mastery and performance in English, thereby revealing the close connection between communicative competence and

educational performance generally. But since the candidates cannot by any stretch of the imagination be classified as educationally subnormal or intellectually deficient, we must assume that the causes of these 'mass failures' are to be found in the inherent weaknesses of the curriculum itself, as well as the negative backwash of the poor examination results on the state of learning and teaching at the SSS level. We shall therefore advocate the adoption of a more realistic and pluralistic approach, one that recognises formal and functional variation across Englishes, as well as the possibility of differences in the performance and motivation of Nigerian learners according to their background and real language need (cf. Kachru 1980, Berns 1990 and Corson 1990).

2. The SSS English Curriculum

(i) Objectives and form

Why Nigerians learnt English in pre-independence years was quite obvious: English was the colonial language and Nigerians needed to speak to the English in their own language. For this purpose they were taught by and received reinforcement directly from native speakers in the colonial service and the process went on fair smoothly. But from the 1960's to date their motivation for learning English has changed as their need for it has become more and more localised; that is, they want it now as a common language to talk to each other, in addition to using it as a tool for the acquisition of modern knowledge and technology for their own self-development. In short, their aim is not to be integrated into English culture or appease anybody but to learn to use English because of its functional relevance for educated Nigerians.

It would therefore be inappropriate and indeed counterproductive for educational institutions and examining bodies like WAEC to try to impose the native speaker model of communicative competence on the Nigerian learner

or use it uncritically as a norm against which to evaluate his attainment in English. The teaching and examination syllabuses prescribed for Nigerian Secondary Schools should in particular not be normed against the communicative competence of the mythical native speaker but against that of the educated Nigerian[2] In other words, we should have different and more realistic expectations for Nigerian L_2 learners. As Savignon (1982) has rightly emphasized:

> "L_2 learners should be evaluated on their ability to perform several language functions simply but appropriately, rather than on their ability to manipulate a limited number of structural features perfectly. --- In other words, proficiency is best determined not by how much language one knows but by how well one can communicate" (p255-6)

Now, the official SSS English syllabus (1985) was designed, according to its authors, to achieve "a high of level proficiency in the Nigerian students use of the English language. It is also aimed at preparing students for tertiary and vocational education as well as for the world of work after leaving school". (Preamble).

The aims are multifarious, and not necessarily ovelapping, yet the authors thought these could be achieved simultaneously by simply 'integrating' the syllabus to promote "a systematic development of both the language skills and literary knowledge that are considered essential for effective use of English in oral and written communication as well as in learning other subjects in the school curriculum". The Syllabus is broken down into convenient component macro-skills and sub-skills, namely, Vocabulary Development, Comprehension (listening and reading) Grammatical structure, Spoken English, Writing and Literature. These are further split into teaching units with fairly detailed notes and examples to assist the teacher.

(ii) Problems and Limitations of the Syllabus

The first problem with this syllabus is structural, that is, the arbitrary ordering of the macro-skills. Why, for instance, should 'Vocabulary Development' come first on the list, rather than, say, spoken English: and why should it be separated from reading or literary study? There appears to be no psycholinguistic or logical basis for this, but it may well be accidental or just a matter of organisation, for the JSS English Syllabus is structured in very much the same way as the SSS one with only very slight differences in detail.

This syllabus is intended to be integrated, but in reality it is not, as no attempt has been made to provide relevant textual materials to stimulate the acquisition, production or appreciation of the "essential elements" mentioned earlier. In any case, I see no obvious value in teaching word-meaning in isolation in an SSS Syllabus, or any other syllabus for that matter; for by this level the learner should have acquired a fair number of vocabulary items to enable him communicate fairly effectively in basic English. 'Vocabulary Development' is a misnomer here as the main concern should be with consolidating the learner's competence and promoting his ability to make finer semantic distinctions between words and expressions in particular contexts.

Similarly, the isolation and teaching of 'grammatical structure' as a distinct macro-skill not only exacerbates the artificial compartmentalisation of items in the syllabus, but also brings to question once again the value of direct grammar teaching in ESL situations. Our concern here is whether this can enhance the attainment of the required high proficiency in the language. For instance, looking through the units covering 'Grammatical Structure' in the syllabus one observes the same topics appearing again and again and prescribed in exactly the same way as in the JSS programme.

Again, a comparison of the SS1 and SS2 units in Appendix II reveals the extent of the repetition and monotony under this component. Any wonder then that the students suffer from excessive 'grammar fatigue'? (cf. Leech & Svartvick 1991:11).[3] Many of them do not take English seriously for precisely this reason, believing they can 'crash programme' it all at the very last minute. But since much of it does not make sense anyway, they end up crashing with F9 as their reward.

Thus contrary to the pragmatic objectives of the structures component; namely,

> "(a) to reinforce the skills acquired in the JSS, and
>
> (b) to advance the pupils' knowledge and skills in the structural patterns of English that will prepare them.
>
> (i) to communicate in speech and in writing nationally and internationally;
>
> (ii) to work effectively in appropriate appointments; and
>
> (iii) to undertake successfully further academic work" (Preamble)

none of the modules or units under this component of the syllabus seems to be specifically designed to impart such competences. In other words, the earlier stated communicative intentions of the curriculum have been set aside or forgotten in the process of specifying the syllabus content, thereby unwittingly exposing the students to the harmful effects of direct grammar teaching, i.e. they end up knowing more about the language than learning how to use it. Now, in an unfavourable learning situation such as we have in Nigeria at the moment this could only lead to confusion and greater anxiety on the part of learners.

Weaver (1979:5) is quite categorical on this:

> "Students do need to develop a good intuitive sense of grammar, but they can do this best through indirect rather than direct instruction. Instead of formally teaching them grammar, we need to give them plenty of structured and unstructured opportunities to deal with language directly. If we want them to improve their reading, they must read: if we want them to improve their writing, they must write. This does not mean, of course that grammar is of no use whatsoever, or that grammatical terminology should be entirely avoided. Rather, it means that teachers need not teach grammar so much as use their own knowledge of grammar in helping students understand and use language more effectively."

Unfortunately this rational view has yet to be widely adopted in Nigeria, with the result that majority of the school textbooks inspired by the "new Syllabus" under review have remained structurally-based and target-centred. In other words, they tend to focus more on teaching the rules of the language than appropriate usage, such that the students end up knowing more about the language than how use it. But as Widdowson (1978) has also warned

> "This knowledge is of little utility on its own; it has to be complemented by a knowledge of appropriate use: it is possible for someone to have learned a large number of sentence patterns and a large number of words which can fit them without knowing how they are put to communicative use".

With respect to the remaining macro-skills:- Comprehension, Spoken English, Writing and Literary study - not much need be said here since they are in essence pragmatically-interrelated. There is the need to stress, however, that since this is supposed to be an integrated teaching syllabus they should not be sharply distinguished, whether in terms of content or teaching materials, as the same texts or materials can be used to stimulate the appreciation and handling of their linguistic and textual properties. For successful performance in each skill, a lot also depends on the teachers ability to coordinate and systematize the application of all available learning materials. It is for this reason that the paucity of qualified and experienced

ESL teachers is one of the most critical problems facing Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools today; much more seriously, I believe, than books because a good teacher can improvise and motivate his students to make the best out of whatever materials are available for language learning, and there are lots of materials around (published and un-published) that can be used for teaching English, this being an ESL country. Students can also be made to create their own learning materials, thereby helping to raise their competence and retain their interest in the language.[4]

(iii) The Mass Failure Problem

As indicated by the statistics in Appendix I the poor performance in English is correlated with poor performance or failure in the other subjects taught through the medium of English. The rate of failure is, however, so massive and so consistent that it has assumed the character of a syndrome, or "Mass Failure" as it is popularly referred to in the literature. This suggests that something is seriously wrong with the whole SSS curriculum, including the evaluation system, contrary to the assertions of the language group at the recent National Curriculum Review Conference at Kaduna (1992)[5]. A curriculum consistently producing 75% failure over a 5-year period cannot be 'adequate' in any educational sense. It is not user-friendly and should not therefore be retained as it is.

Furthermore, since the high failure rate in SSCE is widespread, i.e. occurs in nearly all subjects, we must conclude that the academic and social objectives of the SSS are not being achieved right across the board. For English specifically, it suggests that the students' overall communicative competence in English is declining, instead of improving, despite the fact that English is a core subject and a medium of instruction in both the JSS and SSS. This is contrary to normal expectation that where a language is

used as a medium of instruction as well as a core subject in an educational system its acquisition would be smoother and constantly reinforced.

Now, while the issue of poor performance in English in an ESL-situation is not peculiar to Nigeria (cf. Mcha and Mrindoko, 1980:30 for a similar situation in Tanzania) such bad results are simply intolerable and constitute a serious indictment of the existing educational practices. They may even suggest that Nigerian students are such a lousy lot. But in reality the problem is not one of underachievement or intellectual deficiency at all (cf Bajah 1986:5). In fact Turton (1991, 1992) has argued quite convincingly that the mass failure problem is a 'system - generated' one. That is to say, it derives from the excessive elitism of the syllabus, and the high selectivity of the examination system. The curriculum has in a sense been hijacked to promote the narrow interests of the controllers of the system, the university educated elite, to enable their children to proceed to tertiary education at the expense of the majority (70%). Accordingly the official teaching syllabus has been abandoned or is being selectively implemented to teach only those things that fit the SSCE requirements. The classroom teachers are thus obliged to teach nothing except examination techniques, armed only with WAEC's SSCE syllabus and past questions.

WAEC itself has blamed this tendency on the poor quality of some of the teachers and for lack of suitable teaching materials. But this is only partially true. With the SSC examination as presently structured and organised, the result would remain the same even if all the administrative and logistical problems facing the schools were solved overnight. The simple truth is that the examination is dysfunctional and inappropriate. It makes no real allowances for the local context and, to quote Turton, it "lacks differentiation at the lower levels of ability". It therefore does not give a true picture of students real attainment in each subject. The scores are suspect, especially the ubiquitous F9 grade which the examination favours for 70-75%

of the students who took English in the last five years. It is incredible to suppose that all those students are under-achievers, and that they, and not the examination, are to blame. The high failure rate is occasioned largely by the (no longer tenable) decision of WAEC to norm its examinations against the 'standard of similar examination bodies in the UK, in accordance with its 1952 ordinance. But the UK has long since rationalised its own public examination system, replacing the old GCE A level with a more pragmatic GCSE examination which puts more emphasis on what the students can do in English rather than what they are supposed to know or cannot do. Yet WAEC unwittingly continues to stick to the old system even while attempting to implement a 'new' NPE-inspired syllabus in a Nigerian ESL context.

The result has been more failures and more frustration on the part of the candidates. This will continue until drastic changes are made in the examination system both with respect to content and grading system.

The need for major changes applies particularly to English because of its pivotal role as we have seen. Failure in English has more negative implications than failure in other subjects because a good pass in English is a basic requirement for admission into nearly all post-secondary courses in Nigeria. There is thus a greater need to make the English SSC examination less subjective and restrictive to reflect the real abilities or levels of proficiency of the candidates and to credit them for it.

Unfortunately, the present examination procedures do not seem to have been designed to do this properly. For instance, the emphasis has moved from one extreme to another - from objective, easily assessable discrete-point tasks to more integrative but subjectively - graded tasks. This may be quite in line with recent developments in language testing, but the examination is not well-balanced. More weight seems to be given to reading comprehension and writing and summarising skills at the expense of listening and speaking skills (still optional). Moreover, the time allocated

for the reading and writing tasks is just too short for the candidates to tackle the difficult passages usually chosen: two for comprehension, one for summary, in addition to essay writing, all in $2^{1/4}$ hours, and under rigid examination conditions.

The point we wish to stress here is that even if the time is doubled the students would still have difficulty in demonstrating their real communicative competence. Moreover, experience has shown that the subjectivity element in marking essays and summaries can never be eliminated in the Nigerian context no matter what prior standardisation measures might have been taken; therefore the problem of marker unreliability and bias has to be addressed in this examination before we can accept the numerous F9 grades as well merited.

There is, in any case, no longer any need to use the SSCE for <u>selective</u> purposes, as JAMB now takes care of that aspect through its own special (JME) examinations for which a Pass or Fail is immaterial. This move by JAMB was necessitated by the growing unreliability of the SSCE results, due to large scale malpractices by many students and staff in order to gain an unfair advantage over others. But this may all be traceable to the fact that a single exam is currently used to serve many purposes at once (diagnostic, proficiency/attainment, placement, etc). We believe the time has come to adopt a more pragmatic approach to the problem.

4. Proposals

In order to achieve improved educational performance in English at the SSS level, particularly in the SSCE a stronger foundation must be laid for it at the JSS level. Unfortunately this does not occur at the moment because of the students poor language background among other things. In other words, many students come to the secondary school knowing little or no English, thereby necessitating the continued use of the mother tongue as a

medium for teaching other subjects in some instances. In fact some teachers complain that in the case of some science subjects they have to resort to this practice even at the SSS level to get the students to understand them fully. This suggests that despite the presence of English as a core subject in its own right and as a tool for learning other subjects, at the primary school level, and the JSS level, many students still have difficulties with English language and, given the usual close relationship between the language of instruction and educational performance generally it is not surprising that the SSCE results have been anything but impressive over the years. To improve performance at the SSS level and thereby enhance the place of English in the curriculum we need to resolve the problems and deficiencies at the JSS and Primary levels.

To me the best answer to this is to go back to the NPE and implement its language provisions fully. But in view of the fact that L_1 learning itself is seldom completed in preadolescence years (See Mohammed 1991, Radford 1988) I would further suggest that the mother tongue be used as medium of instruction and as a core subject during the whole primary school period. In my view this is the only way to achieve NPE objective of inculcating "permanent literacy and numeracy" and the ability to communicate effectively, so that by JSS 1 a firm foundation for proper L_2 learning would have been laid. [6] JSS English should then concentrate on developing communication skills in English with as little direct grammar teaching as possible (Weaver 1979). Against this background SSS level English language can be continued successfully as prescribed to serve both as a core subject and medium of instruction across the whole curriculum. This should hopefully also obviate the structural monotony and low productivity of the existing curriculum as shown in Appendix II.

The present situation is one in which most students are proficient in neither L_1 nor L_2, such that at both the JSS and SSS levels the 'achieved

curriculum' markedly differs from the 'intended' one (Ohuche 1987:78), inevitably resulting in poor performance at the end.

ii) The SSS English Curriculum itself should be straightened out to make it more learner - centred and communication-oriented. That is, it should have more realistic objectives, reflecting the learners real language requirements (as delimited by Banjo 1989, for example), rather than the decontextualised global competence it presently seeks to impart. As Kachru (1988:15) has rightly observed such an approach can easily "take us away from linguistic and functional realism"

iii) Moreover, the dominant (if not domineering) role of the teacher in the SSS classroom tends to turn the learners into passive observers only, copying notes given by him and memorising them for examinations without understanding. This rote learning strategy has definitely contributed to the present situation whereby learners are generally unable to express themselves fluently and spontaneously in English. Such students, properly speaking, know a lot about English but they cannot use it comprehensively.

iv) With respect to teaching methodology, instead of the present behavioural/structuralist emphasis, a pragmatically-oriented language-Across-the-Curriculum-approach (Corson, 1990, Gove, 1984) would be be more appropriate to motivate both students and other subject teachers to be positively disposed toward English as a learning tool. In other words, the course should be made more relevant and interesting for non-specialist students and teachers of other disciplines, particularly the teachers, who could be made to play a complementary role in the English teaching process by being asked to take a more active interest in their students use of the language. In this way every teacher would be a language teacher too. This had been tried successfully before but has now become imperative because of the shortage of qualified language teachers. The few available teachers could therefore do with all the help they could get. It is suggested further that the

present English programme be split into three according to the relative competence or varied needs of the students:

a To teach language only and directly - for specialist students with high level of proficiency in English who may wish to study it further;

b. To teach language indirectly, through content of other desciplines being studied - for non-specialist students, e.g. Science and engineering students whose motivation for learning English is purely instrumental;

c. To teach specific-subject content through simplified language in collaboration with the relevant content teachers, especially where learners proficiency is very low.

For (b) & (c) as indicated proper coordination with non-specialist subject teachers in necessary, though not always easy to obtain (Corson 1990), if meaningful improvements are to be achieved in the performance of the students.

v) The SSC English examination itself should be consistent with classroom goals and sociolinquistic realities. It is quite evident that the present WAEC examination does not make real concessions to the students context. It is just a standard language examination which can be applied anywhere. Now, it is this attempt to decontextualise the examination and make it available to all manner of students regardless of their language background and proficiency level that has made it inappropriate and dysfunctional. As indicated above, the high rate of failure (70%-75%) since the new SSCE started (1988) cannot be explained away by dwelling on, e.g. problems of policy implementation, as the same trend started in Nigeria about ten years earlier (cf WAEC Report 1980). So there must be something wrong with the system. Specifically there is the need to re-design it to meet various needs and purposes, not imported prejudices

For instance the SSC English can be split into two self-contained examinations:

(1) **A General English Proficiency Examination** - testing listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing and speaking skills; to be taken by all SSS 3 students. As an integrated achievement test, a good pass in this should be adequate evidence of students communicative competence and capacity to function satisfactorily in any post requiring reasonable proficiency in English. It should also be adequate for admission into non-academic vocational courses.

(2) **A Special Language Examination** - to test students' linguistic (and analytic)[7] competence in English - a more structurally-based examination for those wishing to specialise in English and other related disciplines at tertiary level, or for prospective teachers with sufficient background and interest in the language. In this examination the different macro - skills specified in the National Curriculum namely, grammatical structure, writing, summarising, reading comprehension & Oral English will be tested in detail. A credit pass in it should be adequate for normal admission into the Humanities disciplines (English, History, Philosophy, Nigerian Languages, etc) in universities and similar tertiary institutions.

For both tests, however, higher marks should be awarded for continuous Assessment (CA), say, 50%) (instead of the present 40%) to increase the teacher's involvement in evaluating their students[8]. This would leave just 50% for the final written examination to be allocated proportionately between the receptive (listening and reading comprehension) and productive (speaking and writing) skills.

The advantage of this two-level examination proposal is that it would introduce an element of choice into the system: students would be at liberty to take both papers, or just one, according to need. The papers are designed to serve different needs and are equally respectable. They therefore need not be socially divisive like the defunct GCE/CSE dichotomy in the UK. They differ in content and pragmatic purpose but may both be

taken by the same students especially those who wish to pursue higher or tertiary education. For the majority, and their prospective employers, the proficiency examination should be adequate. Certification should, however, be predicated on satisfactory performance in Spoken English; in other words, spoken English should be given equal if not more attention as written English, as this is intended to be a communicative competence test.

5. Conclusion

As observed elsewhere (Mohammed 1991) the NPE (1981) is a revolutionary document designed consciously and purposively to promote the educational and developmental goals of the nation. English, though a foreign language, has been recognised as one of the tools for practicalising these goals. But in order to promote its widespread acquisition and in particular improve communicative performance in English among SSS students extreme prescriptivism in content and inflexibility in approach should not be encouraged.

Our review of the existing SSS curriculum, classroom practices, as well as the examination system employed by WAEC suggest that major changes must be made with respect to all of them. The "mass failure" syndrome would remain for a long time, leading to total collapse of the whole educational system, unless urgent curricula changes are introduced as suggested to salvage the situation.

In talking about teaching English generally in Nigeria, or in other ESL situations, the assumption is always made that 'Standard English', (or more correctly, Standard British English) is what is to be or is being, taught. But this is not possible, as few of the classroom teachers in Nigeria actually speak Standard English. At best, those of them who are university graduates, might be said to speak Nigerian English (or Educated Nigerian English) with locally determined variations and accents (see Todd & Hancock 1990:304).

We should remember also that other (less acceptable) local forms of English do co-exist with these ones, like pidgin, 'Enghausa', 'Engligbo', etc. It is inevitable that properties of all these local forms of English should interact and influence each other in both formal and non-formal situations. (cf. Strevens 1978). It would therefore be fundamentally wrong to use the native speaker model of communicative competence as the sole means of evaluating performance in English by Nigerian students. Continuing to do so will only worsen their bad performance profile, as usually given by WAEC, and could lead to massive disaffection and possible reaction against the present status and role of English in Nigeria. Our proposals in section 4 were consciously designed to obviate this and to bring sanity and functionalism back to the system as a whole.

Notes

1. The Guardian editorial of 17/10/1992 in fact claims that the failure rate approaches 90% if credit grades only are counted
2. "The educated Nigerian" is defined by Banjo (1984:) broadly as "one who has had at least (full) secondary education", which is equivalent to twelve years of continuous formal education, most of it through the medium of English.
3. It is instructive to observe here that the 'grammar grind' extends downwards even to primary schools. See the list of full-blooded grammatical terms in a primary 6 revision advice.

"Lexis and Structure —
"Preposition and Conjunction
Definite & Indefinite articles
Prepositions & Conjunctions repeated
Punctuations
Direct & Indirect speech
Clauses
Word formation: adjectives from verbs
nouns from verbs
Indefinite Pronouns & Indefinite adverbs
Opposites
Forming Adverbs"

A.B.U. Staff School 28/1/93

4. cf. Dada (1987) and the Guardian editorial (17/10/92) for insightful discussions of the underlying causes of "Mass Failure" in SSCE. See also Bajah (1986) for same applied to science subjects. Most of the reasons are administrative and infrastructural. In this paper we focus on the curricular causes because they are fundamental and more infractable.
5. cf 'Report of the Language Group' (Prof. Funso Akere Chairperson) September 1991 which reviewed various aspects of the existing curriculum. It suggests minor changes in the policy statement on

Nigerian Languages and subject - combinations, but finds nothing wrong with English.':

"The English JSS and SSS curricular are adequate as they are at the moment".

We can therefore expect no major changes under language teaching in the (forth coming) Revised National Curriculum for Secondary Schools in view of this, which would be a great pity and a missed opportunity for these reviews are conducted at 10 year intervals only.

6. Mother tongue medium teaching in the primary school years was in fact standard practice two to three decades ago in Nigerian schools. The issue was re-visited recently by Fafunwa et.al (1989) and its efficacy re-affirmed. Elsewhere various researchers cited by T. Pica (1992) have also shown that learner's native language plays an important role in second language acquisition, stressing the complex nature of the L_1 - L_2 relationship, and the way in which universal aspects of language and language learning can positively influence the acquisition process. So the Nigerian pupil would in fact stand to gain more by learning his native language thoroughly before proceeding to acquire other languages.
7. P. Lassa (1992), a veteran science educator demonstrated his awareness of the serious problem this poses, pleading for understanding and patience in the way we evaluate students:

"Until recently, little attention was devoted to the language of teachers and pupils in classrooms. We communicate with students mainly by a combination of speech and writing. Ideas pass from the teacher to the student largely by means of speech, whereas students' interpretation of these ideas is more often returned in some form of written work. If student ideas seem to be at odds with interpretation of what has been taught, we blame them. These could create unhealthy classroom atmosphere. Using English as a medium of teaching students whose mother-tongue is not English requires experienced teachers. Students need opportunities to express their ideas verbally and by writing exercises. It requires teachers to be generous in interpreting students expressions. Students do not deliberately speak or write rubbish. The apparently wrong or meaningless statement presumably made sense to its

author at the time of writing. If teachers can find out why it made sense to the author and not to the reader, the communication barrier would be removed and conductive classroom atmosphere enhanced. In other words, teachers should be slow and objective in condemning students".

8. cf. Corson (1990:80) (1975), defines "analytic competence" after Bruneer 1975 as "the ability to use language for thinking and for solving problems". But this is just one of the competences underlying 'language proficiency", the others are "linguistic competence" and 'communicative competence' after Chomsky (1990) and Hymes (1972) respectively.
9. We believe this would not necessarily compromise the integrity of the CA scores. As marker unreliability is still high, increasing the value of the CA component may even improve the quality of the examination as the teachers know the students well, and with the help of an agreed format their performance scores can easily be verified. Alternatively, the CA may include profiling to show what each student can do - cf. Phyllis Cove, 1984.

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APPENDIX I

ANALYSIS OF SSCEE RESULTS IN SELECTED SUBJECTS 1988 - 1990

From West African Examinations Council, Yaba, Lagos (1991)

(Cited by Turton 1992)

Subject	Year	Candidates	Percent Grades 1-6	Percent Grades 7&8	Percent Grades F9
Agric. Science	1988	62,712	30.8	25.9	43.3
	1989	63,690	20.0	40.5	39.5
	1990	150,587	25.1	39.3	35.6
Biology	1988	89,342	9.3	16.3	74.4
	1989	87,710	11.8	22.3	65.9
	1990	190,386	15.7	30.8	53.5
Chemistry	1988	34,508	20.7	24.6	54.7
	1989	35,702	10.8	26.7	62.5
	1990	80,059	4.1	20.8	75.1
Physics	1988	26,297	31.5	15.3	53.2
	1989	28,524	9.5	26.9	63.6
	1990	63,161	20.1	32.2	52.3
Mathematics	1988	93,657	11.0	28.3	60.7
	1989	91,142	8.8	30.0	61.2
	1990	195,840	10.6	37.3	52.1
English	1988	92,529	7.7	20.2	73.1
	1989	91,665	9.0	18.3	72.7
	1990	195,133	6.3	21.6	72.1
Hausa	1988	33,194	18.5	25.3	56.2
	1989	38,826	34.8	19.8	45.4
	1990	46,848	24.3	24.0	51.7
Igbo	1988	26,833	44.7	34.2	21.0
	1989	25,845	60.0	30.0	10.0
	1990	45,254	41.0	30.2	28.8
Yoruba	1988	230	67.8	15.2	17.0
	1989	625	46.0	20.4	33.6
	1990	30,907	35.4	25.6	38.7
History	1988	26,985	21.5	33.3	45.2
	1989	22,183	31.1	20.2	48.7
	1990	37,227	33.6	24.7	41.7
Geography	1988	47,539	29.6	10.0	60.4
	1989	50,914	29.0	18.0	53.0
	1990	115,213	39.6	15.5	44.9
Government	1988	25,931	36.9	14.3	38.8
	1989	24,837	45.1	28.7	26.2
	1990	69,611	41.4	34.8	23.8
Economics	1988	68,223	21.8	35.0	43.2
	1989	64,575	24.3	35.8	38.9
	1990	149,958	28.0	37.3	34.7